ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXXI, zeszyt 9 – 2023
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rh23719.4

KATARZYNA SAREK

CHINA'S "NOT SO DETACHED FROM REALITY" LITERARY AVANT-GARDE: SU TONG AND HIS SUBVERSIVE OPPOSITION TO COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY

Chinese avant-garde literature, which emerged from mid-1980s to the early 1990s, is generally described as depoliticised and highly individualistic. By focusing on the individual, writers are said to have sought to distance themselves from the trauma of the Cultural Revolution and to manifest a lightness of being and a detachment from the past. Their disinterest in reality would also be expressed in formal terms – stylistic experiments, the introduction of metafiction, a departure from realism, and language games. Contrary to popular belief, however, the Chinese avant-garde has not cut itself off from its political and social past and present. In fact, Su Tong's early prose is based on the antithesis of official communist ideology. Su Tong describes important elements of contemporary Chinese history, such as rural-urban migration, modernisation, land reform, but presents them not as the result of class struggle, but as a tangle of individual feelings and blind fate. In the stories of the Maple Village cycle, the characters seem to fit stereotypes, such as the landlord being evil and oppressing the peasants. However, the way they are portrayed and the nature of the relationships between them defy clichés and undermine the validity of political stereotypes. Hatred is the main driving force behind the characters' behaviour and is present in every interpersonal relationship. Su Tong's frequent motif of men fleeing the countryside for the city is an expression of individual helplessness, and the portrayal of cities as nests of corruption and crime challenges the country's modernisation achievements.

KATARZYNA SAREK, PhD — Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of Oriental Studies, Department of Japonology and Sinology; email: katarzyna.sarek@uj.edu.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002- 4298- 6301.

Views on the role of literature in modern China were consolidated at the Yan'an Conference in 1942, where Mao Zedong in his famous *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* outlined the principles and goals for Chinese "art and literary workers" (*wenyi gongzuozhe* 文艺工作者). One of the main and general thoughts of the *Talks* can be characterized as pragmatism: "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, and yet in turn exert enormous influence on it" (McDougall 77). "Mao is interested in literature only as an instrument of inspiration and education," McDougall (12) writes, later adding that this pragmatism could, on the one hand, allow for a certain flexibility in one's view of literature, but on the other hand led to the creation of rigid rules, which Mao himself not only did not discourage, but in some ways encouraged. One of the first paragraphs of the *Talks* clearly demonstrates Mao's pragmatic and utilitarian approach to literature. He states that the purpose of the conference is "to ensure that literature and art become a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy, and help the people achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy" (58).

The ground rules for literary creation and evaluation, as expressed in Mao's *Talks*, did not change drastically in the late 1970s and early 1980s – literature was still meant to serve politics, and the political criteria of its evaluation were still placed above the artistic ones (Link 1-12).

After Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, China entered a period of change. This included the cultural sphere, although the changes were not revolutionary. There were two key moments. The first was a report by the newly appointed chairman of the CCP Central Committee, Hua Guofeng (1921-2008), in August 1977, in which he not only announced the official end of the Cultural Revolution but, more importantly, spoke of a return to the policy of the Hundred Flowers, in the sense of opening up the space for writers to express their ideas freely and without fear of persecution. Hua also mentioned that the influence of traditional culture and the West must be accepted and encouraged as something positive for Chinese literature. He also emphasised the need to educate intellectuals to be, euphemistically, helpful to the cause of building socialism, a significant shift in the conception of the principles of the Talks (Duke 4). The second key moment was the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC, held from 12 to 19 December 1978. On this occasion, three principles were declared: "emancipation of the mind" (*jiefang sixiang* 解放 思想), "seeking truth from facts" (*shishi qiushi* 实事求是), and "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth" (*shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biaozhun* 实践是检验真理的唯一标

准) (Duke 6). The purpose of these principles was the general work of modernisation, but it also gave intellectuals the idea that they could "break into previously forbidden zones and not fear the return of repressive policies" (Link 20).

After a brief thaw, the authorities felt that artists were taking too much advantage of the freedom they had been given, and the "Anti-Spiritual Pollution" (*qingchu jingshen wuran* 清除精神污染) campaign was launched in the autumn of 1983. At that time, four theoretical issues were mainly discussed, such as "socialist alienation" (*shehuizhuyi yihua* 社会主义异化), "humanism" (*rendaozhuyi* 人道主义), "modernism" (*xiandaizhuyi* 现代主义) and "realism" (*xianshizhuyi* 现实主义). In terms of literary ideology, the main criterion through which the others gain validity is the long-term problem of realism in literature and the appropriation of realism as the definition of literary endeavour. The other three concepts, such as humanism, alienation and modernism, cannot be separated from realism; in fact, their value becomes apparent when they are juxtaposed, conceptually and temporally, with the problems underlying realistic representation in literature (Larson 37-71). Some even linked the development of modernism to the country's economic development. Xu Chi's basic thesis was that Deng Xiaoping's modernisation programme would lead to modernist literary experiments because it was an inevitable process of development, and that such experiments would even indicate that Chinese society had indeed modernised (Xu Chi 15-17). However, realism was most often confronted with modernism, which was criticised as an import from the West and an ineffective tool for describing Chinese realities.

The beginning of the campaign was abrupt, and the end just as abrupt, at the behest of Deng Xiaoping in the spring of 1984 and the atmosphere once again became more writer-friendly. In this atmosphere, several young writers have emerged on China's literary scene, and their works have amazed critics and attracted the attention of readers. The mid-1980s brought a new trend – avant-garde literature. It appeared around 1985, developed for about a decade and came to an end in the mid-1990s. Two high points can be distinguished in it. The first was at the very beginning, when works were published that stood out in terms of language and content – including works by Mo Yan and Can Xue. The second peak was in 1987, when three writers – Su Tong, Yu Hua, Ge Fei – came to the fore in avant-garde literature and maturity, stylistic originality and depth of content were already visible in their stories (Yu Zhansui 7). Avant-garde literature is fundamentally different from previous trends, not only because of its experimental techniques and artistic originality, but also because of its completely different approach to the traditional role of literature in China. This is manifested

in the rejection of didacticism and the use of literature as a tool, the full autonomy of the work and the author, or the abandonment of realism. Chinese critics claim that avant-garde literature owes much, if not all, of its originality to foreign inspiration (Zhang Xudong 35-76, Yang Xiaobing 23-46). This opinion is a gross oversimplification and shows the schematic approach of always opposing the West and China, because it can be said that Western influence initiated the beginning of the changes that led to the emergence of avant-garde literature, but this was only an impulse, and the Chinese avant-garde is the original use of Western inspiration in the local literary tradition.

Almost from the very beginning of the emergence of avant-garde literature, critics drew attention to what they saw as its detachment from reality and indifference to the current political and social situation in China. This judgmental interpretation appears in both Chinese and Western authors' studies. The indifference and the refusal of the young writers to relate to the reality of life is emphasised: "avant-garde fiction strictly maintained its distance from reality, refusing to give readers any interpretations concerning actual events related to politics, society, ethics, or human nature" (Tao Dongfeng 101). "The young heretics' fabrication of a rootless subject, devoid of memory" (Jing Wang 3) became a symbol of the decadent attitude of avant-garde writers. They were also accused of alienation from ideological debates, hedonism, a focus on fun and enjoyment, and a shift away from contemporary themes to nostalgia and poetic imagery (Wu Liang 124). And their indifference to contemporary issues was linked to the climate of the era: "this avoidance of contemporary society in fact reflected important cultural characteristics of the 1980s: resistance, suspicion, disagreement, experiment, imitation, borrowing, and an emphasis on individual emotions and psychological experiences" (126). This indifference is even identified as a distinguishing mark of a whole trend: "historical irreverence is a hallmark of avant-garde fiction" (Jones 558).

From the very beginning, Chinese literature was didactic and historicist (e.g. Plaks 311-13; Idema and Haft), aimed to educate and transmit the truth and, even in the twentieth century, served as a tool used by the ruling classes to convey a particular ideology and values to the public, as well as to expose the ills of society and draw attention to what could be cured (Lu Xun 262-65). It was also believed that it was the duty of literature to record and respond to historical changes (Denton 48). Chinese literature in the 20th century also had a mission to fulfil – to awaken minds, to save the nation, to fight, to be a moral backbone, to promote positive role models. The writer had a duty to society, and avant-garde writers were supposed to be the first to break with this tradition. "The individual as

subject, identity, and body is placed back in the center stage of the narrative, and by so doing Maoist ideology and the current political dialectic socialism-post-socialism is left aside" (Castelli 9-10). According to David Der-wei Wang (253), it was only from the beginning of the 1990's that Chinese avant-garde writers such as Ma Yuan, Yu Hua, Ge Fei and Su Tong "tried to break away from hard-core obsession with China" – phrase coined by C. T. Hsia used to describe the general tendency of modern Chinese literature – and led the push to return literature to being art, with whatever the reader comes away with being a product of the reader. Zhao Yiheng (263) believes that avant-garde writers have deliberately removed all traces of intentionality from their works, and that their works are devoid of any message and do not force the reader to look for interpretative clues. Hong Zhigang (261), at the end of his book on Chinese avant-garde literature, "excuses" its creators because, although their works do not represent the views of society and exemplify the attitude of individualism, they still stand out for their high artistic value and formal innovation. According to Lombardi (305) fantastic elements in Su Tong's work are not used to convey moral or political content, nor to criticise the political system, he uses them only as a literary device and a metaliterary diversion, which is supposed to be evidence of Su Tong's interest in formal and content experiments, because Su Tong considers literature as an independent and creative space. Zofia Jakubów, meanwhile, drew attention to the cathartic function of Su Tong's prose, which gives voice to the wronged in his works, helping them to come to terms with their trauma (153). There is also a thesis among Chinese scholars that identifies avant-garde literature as the precursor of postmodernism in China. Renowned literary critic Chen Xiaoming treats the Chinese literary avant-garde not as a separate and closed literary trend, but as the first wave of postmodernism in China, a point he even made in the title of his comprehensive monograph, one of the very few published in China devoted to this trend. The subversiveness of the Chinese avant-garde was noted in František Reismüller's doctoral thesis entitled *Multilayered Subversion and Double-Edged Subjectivity: Chinese Avant-Garde Literature of the Second Half of the 1980s*. However, the author devoted only a few pages (177-83) to Su Tong's short stories about Maple Village and focused on other aspects of the writer's work, such as subjectivity or decadence.

In the above paragraphs, selected quotations from various books and articles have been cited, which show that researchers are mostly in no doubt – Chinese avant-garde literature was depoliticised, detached from the realities of Chinese society, and this was a deliberate act by avant-garde writers. Using the example of the story cycle from Su Tong's Maple Village, it will be shown that, nevertheless, at

least Su Tong wrote works that referred directly to Chinese realities and commented critically on the main ideas of communist ideology. It will be demonstrated that Chinese avant-garde literature cannot be unequivocally called unreal, depoliticised and focused solely on the individual rather than on society and reality.

Su Tong is considered to be a good storyteller, which, to put it bluntly, is quite unique among avant-garde novelists, and for this reason he was liked by Chinese critics from the beginning (Wang Haiyan 80). His excellent narrative skills make up for the weaknesses of the difficult texts and overwhelming ideas of the other avant-garde writers, which makes it possible for the film and television industry to make frequent use of his stories. Su Tong's talent and ability to create interesting and emotional plots are also appreciated by Western critics. David Der-Wei Wang calls Su Tong "one of the most charming storytellers of the early nineties, who displays a rich, elaborate symbolism and an ornate vocabulary" (Running 246), and Jeffrey Kinkley (469) remarks that Su Tong "has a talent for revisualizing China's vastest landscapes and most sordid, tangled human relations in full, wide-screen technicolor".

Maple Village cycle consist of ten short stories written between 1986 and 1995: *Opium Family* 罂粟之家 (1988), *Nineteen Thirty Four Escapes* 1934 年的逃亡 (1987), *Flying over Maple Village* 飞越我的枫杨树故乡 (1987), *Escape* 逃 (1989), *Season of the Grandmother* 祖母的季节 (1986), *A Tribute to the Red Horse* 祭奠红马 (1988), *Outlander Father and Son* 外乡人父子 (1986), *Song of the Osmanthus Tree* 桂花树之歌 (1992), *Three Lamps* 三盏灯 (1995), *Nineteen Houses* 十九间房 (1992).[1] Only seven of them definitely have Maple Village as their background; for the other three stories, we can only be sure that they take place in the Southern water country (南方水乡). The stories do not form a consistent series, the characters are not repeated or related, they are linked mainly by the place of action and the world described, full of symbolism of the South – fertile land full of crops, water and rice. There is also no coherence between the first-person stories, the 'I' in one story is different from the 'I' in the next, and in each the narrator is unreliable, contradicting himself and deliberately altering real historical events. On the many interwoven narrative levels of the short stories, the narrator switches between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic positions, but in many of the episodic stories he is not the primary witness. On the one hand, he retells someone else's memories, and on the other, he allows the memories to play out in the mind of the implied reader, as if to emphasise the subjectivity of those memories.

[1] The list of stories is drawn from Su Tong's 2011 anthology of short stories entitled 枫杨树山歌.

Written over a period of almost ten years, the stories of the Maple Village series, which also show the author's creative growth, display several characteristic aspects of Su Tong's fiction in general, which may also indicate the subversive nature of his writings. The manner of narration, the themes of the stories and the symbolism contained in them are drastically different from standard communist literature, and can even be said to be a caricature of it. The first and the most visible is the unreliability of the narrator, showed through the incredulity of memory and recollections. The second is the shift in focus from official, universal and historical events to unofficial, individual and fictional phenomena. Metafictional devices are used to emphasise the fictionality of history, which can be read as a mockery and a discreditation of the Maoist vision of history. This attitude can be perceived as derision because Su Tong basically follows the path set by the authorities – he presents the past and the present, but firstly he presents a personal version of history, not the official one, and secondly the conclusions drawn from this comparison are quite different from those desired by the authorities. The next characteristic of Su Tong's short stories is a sense of rootlessness and detachment linked with a sense of nostalgia. Not only has the narrator never been a part of the past he describes, but he is not exactly searching for it in the sense of trying to reveal it as something given and firmly rooted in his family's collective history. He prefers, at times, simply to invent missing parts, to embellish details and to invent the motivations and aims of the protagonists. Su Tong himself admits that he is not particularly concerned with the authenticity of historical events when he writes, and that the concrete historical elements that appear in his works are as real as "a scary dream on a rainy night" (Su Tong, *My Life as Emperor* vi).

Another aspects of Su Tong's work that are evident in the stories of the Maple Village series from the first view are decadence and a fascination with violence. Sabina Knight (93-94) argues that Su Tong constructs an apocalyptical world full of inexplicable evil and violence to show the price of change imposed on people by force and society's inevitable resistance to ideological programmes, however attractive they may be. This is indicative of the disillusionment with the processes taking place in China at the time; hasty modernisation, industrialisation and rural-urban migration had disrupted social structures and undermined individuals' sense of security. The South created by Su Tong is steeped in decadence and fatalism. Perhaps this is why the series wasn't very popular at first, as mainstream Chinese literature at the time tended to be either idealistic and optimistic about the future, or reflective and learning from the turbulent past. The socialist idealism, optimism

and humanism promoted by the authorities is in stark contrast to Su Tong's work at the time (Choy 137).

The past in Su Tong's works is symbolic, and the narrator does not even hide the fact that the events he describes may be a complete fabrication and have nothing to do with reality. In the story *Flying over Maple Village*, the narrator recounts in detail the story of an uncle who drowned the year the narrator was born: "I was a quiet, beautiful baby, but I clearly remember witnessing the three-night vigil beside the coffin.… The vigil is three hundred miles away, but it seems to be taking place right besides my cradle" (Su Tong, *Flying* 154). Despite the stylisation of the short stories into family accounts with autobiographical elements, the knowledge of the past does not come from memory or testimony, but is purely a product of the imagination. "If you are like me and have had strange dreams ever since you were a child, then you will see your old homeland, your clan, and your relatives in your dreams" (159). The relationship between fiction and history in avant-garde works is, after all, to a large extent subversive.

Su Tong depicts a reality in which people are deprived of a sense of stability and security, as neither material objects, human relationships, nor the economic and political situation provide it. By deconstructing important symbols and concepts of Chinese culture that predate the communist era but have been adopted and celebrated by communist ideology, and by using various formal techniques, the writer acts as a voice of defiance and rebellion, not expressed directly, but cloaked in narrative and symbolism.

For Howard Choy (135) the stories of the Maple Village series "deals with deplacement between the country and the city". In the 1980s, China embarked on a period of rapid modernisation and urbanisation, and leaving the countryside for the city became an everyday experience for millions of Chinese. The city began to be identified with modernity, progress, better living conditions and opportunities for a more prosperous future, while the countryside was associated with backwardness, poverty and the past. In *1934 Escapes*, Chen Baonian deserts his newlywed wife and the ricefields and runs to the city for a new start, where he makes a fortune out of his skills as a bamboo craftsman. In Su Tong, both of these worlds are portrayed as hostile to human beings, each in its own way, but both bringing misery and sometimes even death to their inhabitants. Su Tong touches on the painful process of modernisation in the rural areas and debunks the image of China's prosperous, peaceful and cultured South. In Su Tong's works, we see a desolate rural villages on the verge of collapse due to floods, pestilence and famine. However, spiritual degeneration there is even more frightening. Frequent calamities of mysterious origin seem to be sent down from Heaven to haunt the

southern villages where wickedness reigns. Instead of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which are supposed to be the pillars of Chinese morality, we see widespread desertion, betrayal, murder and incest. Villagers who flee to the enticing city succumb to further depravity, only in a new form. Those who flee from the countryside to the cities receive a "deserved" punishment, which in men's case is often venereal disease. In *Escape* Sanmai "picked up a filthy disease in town" (Su Tong, *Escape* 445) and "he got punishment he deserved. Served him right, the bastard" (448). Sometimes their escape is only possible at the cost of the lives of others, and is accompanied by murder, deceit and betrayal. What Su Tong sees in the process of urbanisation is not new hope and joy for the bankrupt peasants, but a great deception. By presenting the city and the countryside in this way, Su Tong expresses his attitude towards both and sees no way out, negating the progressiveness of history and the idea of development and modernisation. There is no escape from the South, although most of the characters in the Su Tong's stories have experienced it, only to find that the city is no better than the countryside. "If I ran to the ends of the earth, I could never escape" (453) says the dying Sanmai. Su Tong has an enormous talent for showing how the past dominates the present, and nowhere does this theme emerge more forcefully than in "Opium Family". The penultimate line of the novella emphasises the impossibility of escaping the past: "Right down to this day Lu Fang says he can still smell the odor of opium on his person; no matter how much he washes, it will never wash off" (Su Tong, *Opium Family* 268).

Rice appears frequently in Su Tong's stories. This is not surprising – it is the staple food of the China. The importance of rice in Chinese culture can be compared to the importance of bread in Western culture; both products have historically been the staple food for the population and both appear very frequently in national literature. Rice is a valuable and respected product, the most important grain associated with southern China. The work of the peasants is highly valued in communist ideology, and the peasants themselves are seen as the most important part of society, providing food for the whole nation. In Su Tong's short stories, however, the peasants have no hesitation in abandoning rice cultivation for the greater profits to be made from opium, with red poppy fields replacing green rice paddies, and they don't care about the consequences for the society. In *Opium Family*, Liu Laoxia "the opium he held in his hands burned madly out of control in the world beyond Maple Village, blackening nearly half the country" (Su Tong, *Opium Family* 213). His son Chencao watches his father carefully examine a handful of the opium he has produced and thinks: "Perhaps the powder Dad has in his hands really is the sacred fire we all depend

on for life. It nurtured Maple Village after a century of hunger, and it nurtured me, but I'm still confused about it" (213). The transformation of the South from a supplier of rice to a producer of drugs that destroy the nation, as well as the blasphemous comparison of opium to the fire of Prometheus, can be read symbolically: the peasants harm instead of nourish, producing not food but poison. The peasants in Su Tong's fiction are not the salt of the nation, a social stratum that has retained positive traditions and values, but ruthless and greedy individuals who live by exploiting others. This kind of portrayal is closer to that of the exploiting classes – the landlords, the rich or the merchants; in the official ideology, the peasants were always the oppressed class, not the oppressors.

In communist literature, representatives of different social classes were portrayed in a schematic way – the landlords were always rich, cruel, greedy and oppressed the peasants, while the peasants were poor, oppressed and honourable. In Su Tong it seems similar – Liu Laoxia of *The Opium Family* is a ruthless leech who exploits and harasses the peasants under him, including raping their wives and daughters. His son Chencao, who is to inherit his father's property, is shown in a different light – he has a modern education, does not want to follow in his father's footsteps and has doubts about growing opium. Su Tong portrays him as a victim of fate – Chencao does things he doesn't want to do because he feels he has to fulfil his obligations to his family. When family's former employee Chen Mao joins a communist militia and rapes Liu Suizi, Chencao's sister, Chencao kills the rapist on the orders of his father, who forbids him to return home before taking revenge. Chencao emerges as a tragic figure, a man in an even worse position than the peasants, for while the latter can always join the Communists and try to change their fate, Chencao, as the son of a landlord, is denied even that option.

This way of depicting characters, showing their moral dilemmas, their powerlessness in the face of fate and the ambiguity of their attitudes, contrasts with the obligatory way of depicting characters in communist literature, where there was a black-and-white division of roles and no room for nuance.

Communist activists in Chinese communist literature are always positive characters who join the revolution for the sake of social justice. In Su Tong it looks different. Chen Mao becomes a communist to take revenge on his enemies and to rape women in the village with impunity. When Lu Fang, the squad leader, asks Chen Mao if he raped the landlord's daughter, Chen Mao is convinced that there was nothing wrong with it and confirms it without hesitation. After long thought, Lu Fang decides to take away Chen Mao's rifle and remove him from his position as chairman of the peasants' association, to which Chen Mao reacts with disbelief

and anger: "Why can't I fuck her? I hate them all, and I can make the revolution against them!" (Su Tong, *Opium Family* 260).

Even real historical events, which occasionally appear in the stories of Maple Village, are presented in Su Tong in a way that contradicts the official ideology. In Su Tong's works, the Korean War of 1950, which is portrayed in the official narrative as a spontaneous and courageous uprising of Chinese volunteers, has nothing heroic about it. Chen Sanmai joins the army not out of patriotism or bravery – the narrator says of him that he "had always been a timid and cowardly little man" – but because it was the only place he could survive when he left his family and fled his village. When he returns from the war, emaciated, the whole village treats him as a hero, but it is soon discovered that Chen Sanmai is a deserter, as he admits to his wife: "I didn't want to die, so I escaped and came home" (Su Tong, *Escape*, 451).

The Maple Tree cycle of short stories offers a vivid and brutal portrait of Chinese society over several decades, exploring themes of violence, decadence, family relationships and the impact of historical events on individual lives. The cycle has been widely acclaimed for its vivid characters, richly detailed settings and powerful exploration of the complexities of Chinese history. At the same time, this series of short stories can be seen as an example of Su Tong's subversive attitude towards official communist ideology, which is not immediately obvious, but becomes apparent on closer analysis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Castelli, Alberto. "Chinese Literary Avant-garde: A Tale of Magic." *Folia Linguistica et Litteraria*, no. 34, 2021, pp. 7-24.

Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明. *Wubian de tiaozheng – Zhongguo xianfeng wenxue de houxiandaixing* 无边的挑战——中国先锋文学的后现代性. Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2015.

Choy, Howard Y. F. *Remapping the Past. Fictions of History in Deng's China, 1979-1997*. Brill, 2008.

Denton, Kirk A. *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling.* Stanford UP, 1998.

Duke, Michael S. *Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post-Mao Era.* Indiana UP, 1985.

McDougall, Bonnie S. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1953 Text with Commentary*. U of Michigan P, 1980.

Hong Zhigang 洪治纲. *Shouwang xianfeng: jianlun Zhongguo dangdai xianfeng wenxue de fazhan* 守望先锋: 兼论中国当代先锋文学的发展. Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005.

Idema, Wilt, and Lloyd Haft. "The Central Tradition in Traditional Society." *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*, edited by Corinne H. Dale. State U of New York P, 2004, pp. 33-46.

Jakubów, Zofia. “Recovering a Lost Voice: Su Tong’s and Yu Hua’s Cathartic Fiction.” *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. 68, no. 9 (2020), pp. 139-55.

Jones, Andrew F. “Avant-garde Fiction in China.” *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Kirk A. Denton, Bruce Fulton, and Sharalyn Orbaugh, Columbia UP, 2003, pp. 554-60.

Kinkley, Jeffrey. “Rice by Su Tong, Howard Goldblatt.” *World Literature Today*, Spring 1996, pp. 469-70.

Knight, Sabina. “Decadence, Revolution and Self-Determination in Su Tong’s Fiction.” *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, 1998, pp. 91-112.

Larson, Wendy. “Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-”Spiritual Pollution” Campaign in China.” *Modern China*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 37-71.

Link, Perry, editor. *Stubborn Weeds: Popular and Controversial Chinese Literature after the Cultural Revolution*. Indiana UP, 1983.

Lombardi, Rosa. “The Presence of Fantastic Elements in Su Tong’s Short Stories.” *Fantômes dans l’Extrême-Orient d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, vol. 2, edited by Marie Laureillard and Vincent Durand-Dastès. Presses de l’Inalco, 2017, pp. 297-306.

Lu Xun. *Selected works*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Languages Press, 1980.

Plaks, Andrew H., et al. “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative.” *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, edited by Andrew H. Plaks. Princeton UP, 1977, pp. 309-52.

Reismüller, František. *Multilayered Subversion and Double-Edged Subjectivity: Chinese Avant-Garde Literature of the Second Half of the 1980s*. 2019. Charles University, Department of East Asian Studies, PhD dissertation.

Su Tong. *Escape*. Translated by Michael S. Duke. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt. Columbia UP, 2007, pp. 445-54.

Su Tong. *Flying over Maple Village*. Translated by Michael S. Duke. *China’s Avant-Garde Fiction. An Anthology*, edited by Wang Jing. Duke UP, 1998, pp. 147-59.

Su Tong. *My Life as Emperor*. Translated by Howard Goldblat. Hyperion, 2005.

Su Tong. *Opium Family.* Translated by Michael S. Duke. *Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas*. Penguin Books, 1996.

Su Tong 苏童. *Fengyangshu shange* 枫杨树山歌. Chongqing daxue chubanshe 重庆大学出版社, 2011.

Tao Dongfeng. “Thirty Years of New Era Literature: From Elitization to De-Elitization.” *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Zhang Yingjin. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016, pp. 98-115.

Wang, David Der-wei. *Running Wild: New Chinese Writers*. Columbia UP, 1994.

Wang Haiyan 王海燕. “Su Tong lun” 苏童论. *Anqing Shifan Xueyuan xuebao* 安庆师范学院学报, vol. 4, 1994, pp. 80-85.

Wang Jing. *Introduction. China’s Avant-Garde Fiction. An Anthology*. Duke UP, 1998.

Wu Liang. “Re-membering the Cultural Revolution. Chinese Avant-Garde Literature of the 1980s.” *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*, edited by Pang-Yuan Chi and David Der-Wei Wang. Indiana UP, 2000, pp. 124-36.

Xu Chi 徐迟. “Xiandaihua yu xiandaipai 现代化与现代派.” *Waiguo wenxu yanjiu* 外国文学研究, vol. 1, 1982, pp. 115-17.

Yang Xiaobin. *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction*. U of Michigan P, 2002.

Yu Zhansui. *Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction: Quest for Historicity and Transcendent Truth*. Cambria Press, 2017.

Zhang Xudong. *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*. Duke UP, 1997.
Zhao Yiheng. *The River Fans Out: Literature and its Theories in China.* Springer Singapore, 2020

CHINA'S "NOT SO DETACHED FROM REALITY" LITERARY AVANT-GARDE: SU TONG AND HIS SUBVERSIVE OPPOSITION TO COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY

S u m m a r y

Individualistic and non-political. While it is true that these writers focused on the individual and experimented with stylistic techniques, they did not completely disconnect themelves from China's political and social realities. Su Tong's works, for instance, challenge the communist ideology and explore contemporary Chinese history through personal experiences. His characters may appear to be stereotypes, but their relationships defy clichés, and the stories reveal the destructive power of hatred. Furthermore, Su Tong's portrayal of rural-urban migration expresses individual helplessness, and his depiction of cities as corrupt and crime-ridden questions the success of China's efforts at modernisation

Keywords: Su Tong; Maple Village cycle; Chinese modern literature; avant-garde literature; subversion

CHIŃSKA „NIE TAK ODERWANA OD RZECZYWISTOŚCI" LITERACKA AWANGARDA: SU TONG I JEGO SUBWERSYWNA OPOZYCJA DO IDEOLOGII KOMUNISTYCZNEJ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Indywidualizm i apolityczność. Choć prawdą jest, że tak nacechowani pisarze skupiali się na jednostce i eksperymentowali z technikami stylistycznymi, nie odrywali całkowicie tematów od realiów politycznych i społecznych Chin. Na przykład prace Su Tonga rzucają wyzwanie ideologii komunistycznej i eksplorują współczesną historię Chin poprzez osobiste doświadczenia. Jego bohaterowie mogą wydawać się stereotypowi, ale ich relacje wymykają się schematom, a historie ukazują niszczycielską siłę nienawiści. Co więcej, portret migracji ze wsi do miast przez Su Tonga wyraża indywidualną bezradność, a jego przedstawienie miast jako skorumpowanych i opanowanych przez przestępczość kwestionuje powodzenie wysiłków Chin na rzecz modernizacji

Słowa kluczowe Su Tong; cykl Maple Village; chińska literatura współczesna; literatura awangardowa; subwersja